No. 12. On Honesty.

25th Deuteronomy, 14th, 15th, 16th.

Thou shalt not have in thy house divers measures, a great and a small.—

But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight—a perfect and just measure shalt thou have; that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

For all that do such things, & all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God.

Were the holy Scriptures perused with more frequency, and greater attention, the welfare of society would be preserved by the distribution of Justice and the prevalence of Integrity. For could any man, who had constantly before his eyes God's awful denunciations against fraud, dare, deliberately, to commit it? Would any man, for whatever consideration, who meditates on the scriptures which testify of God—which "shew "us what is good, and what the Lord our God re-

" quires of us"—openly violate those laws which bring dishonor on God, and destruction on himself? No—he would be able to return a right answer to the strong question proposed by our Blessed Saviour—" What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole " world and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man " give in exchange for his soul?"

The design of this discourse is to shew, that every man, by dealing fairly and justly, most effectually promotes his own interest, and secures the blessing of God on his endeavors—& to exhort you, in the last place, as you hope to meet the Saviour of the world in peace, to " wash your hands in innocency, and take heed unto " the thing that is right."

Now, in the language of the text, " not to " have divers measures, a great and a small, but to " have perfect and just weights, and perfect and just " measures," is, not to wrong any one, though, in all human probability, we could do it without danger of

discovery & dread of disgrace: not to have the villany to encroach—or the meanness to impose on the ignorance or simplicity of others, however conducive to our own interest:—not to detain from any one, what we know, in our conscience, belongs to him, though he may not know it himself:—not to deceive by speaking otherwise than we think—but to perform what we profess, & fulfil what we promise: and to be in reality what we are in appearance: It is to observe, literally, the Rule propounded by our Saviour—"whatsoever "ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so "to them:"—it is to prosecute all our designs by fair and honest means, and to challenge the inspection and judgment of God upon our every action.

The advantages of acting fairly and honestly are many in number, and great in value. For what so effectually promotes character and establishes reputation? An honest man we trust with confidence, and

eſteem his promiſe equal ſecurity with the ſtrongest engagements.

Not ſatisfied with employing an honest man ourſelves, we feel it incumbent on us, both for the good of our friends, & as the reward of uprightneſs, to proclaim his Integrity. "Who ever ſaw the Righteous "forſaken?" His honesty entitles him to our notice, & recommends him to our regard, and we are happy to beſtow on him every mark of kindneſs, & every teſtimony of eſteem. To what Inconveniences do men readily put themſelves to befriend an honeſt man? They cheerfully poſtpone a favourite deſign, or a neceſsary work, as well to accommodate him, as, to avoid the employing a man of an infamous, or even of a ſuſpicious character. Let the poor man compare this Luſtre of Reputation, this heart-felt ſatisfaction of integrity, with the advantage of a lie and the gain of deceit—and what was ſaid of the character of the Unrighteous, he will find to be applicable to the work of Unrighteouſneſs.—"I

" went by and lo! it was gone; I sought it but the " benefit of it could no where be actually found." Let him consider further, that when a man has once deservedly obtained the character of Unjust and Unrighteous " no credence is given to his words."—when he speaks truth he is not believed, when he means honestly he is not trusted.—Let the honest man reflect upon this—and he will then see how much better is a little, acquired by justice and improved by integrity, than " great Revenues without Right."

Would men, whose object it is to be rich, duly weigh the prodigious advantages resulting from the reputation of fair-dealing and honesty—whatever might be their principles—they would act fairly—in order to promote their own interest. But to personate a character which has not a real existence—to pretend to be honest, when there is no principle of honesty—what is it but to live in perpetual apprehension, lest some unlucky accident should betray the hypocrisy,

or some unforeseen circumstance discover the guilt, of our conduct? If, therefore, a man think it his Interest to be esteemed an honest man, let him be so indeed —and his conduct, the more it is examined, the more amiable it will appear: for though the fruit of his reputation hangs exposed to the caprice of wantonness, & the violence of outrage, he will, notwithstanding, enjoy it, in security, "under his own vine, and under "his own fig-tree." Fraud, deceit, extortion, point out indeed—but the direction is deceitful—the readiest way to wealth—they lead to "the high-mountain from "which are seen all the glories of the world & the felicity thereof;" but riches, obtained in this manner—by the sacrifice of our innocence and the prostitution of our integrity—are purchased at infinitely too great an expence. To what inconveniencies, troubles, and mortifications has the man exposed himself in the acquisition—to what lashes of censure and keenness of asperity is he perpetually subject—through the brutality

of ignorance and the malevolence of envy—in the enjoyment of this ill-gotten wealth? And, "after walking in a vain shadow," as the Psalmist expresses it, "and disquieting himself in vain—to heap up "riches without knowing who shall gather them— "whether a wise-man or a fool—he leaves them often "in the midst of his days"—the very time he has set apart in his own mind to enjoy them—and the profusion and prodigality with which they are squandered, are, often, proportionate to the avarice & rapacity with which they were acquired. Have not therefore in thy house divers measures, a great and a small, &c.

Let us now see how the Blessing of God may be obtained on honest and fair dealing—and this will appear from the consideration of God's regard to justice, as well as from the testimony of Holy-Writ. The man who trespasses on his neighbor, by breaking down the fences of justice and honesty, sets himself to counteract the designs of Providence.—For it is the will

of Heaven that all men should act with fairness towards each other, because the violation of right introduces into society nothing but distrust, disorder, & confusion. But the Testimony God bears to uprightness is found in almost every page of Scripture—"The "Lord loveth the thing that is right—Such as are "blessed of God shall possess the Land, and they that "are cursed of Him shall be rooted out." Let me not be understood to mean that every honest man prospers in life more than the unjust—this is by no means the case. An honest man, having no indirect views, no fraudulent measures to accomplish, behaves with openness and candor, and, meaning no ill himself, he does not suspect others of it—so that an advantage is frequently taken of his ingenuous and amiable simplicity. Besides, his conduct is a continual reproof to the unjust & unrighteous—it is no wonder, therefore, that "they bend "the bow privily to shoot at him that is true of heart" —as it is written, "the ungodly seeth the righteous,

"and seeketh occasion to slay him." But if, by Prosperity, you mean the Blessing of God, the upright man alone can be said to prosper—"For God "has made an hedge about him, and about his house, "and about all that he hath on every side."

If it be urged in favor of injustice, that men, notorious for oppression, deceit, dishonesty, and every vice which degrade the human heart, are caressed by the Great, and patronized by the Wealthy—let not this stagger thy virtue nor provoke thy indignation. "This "is an evil under the Sun, & it is common among "men." But, as in the days of the Psalmist, so likewise, in our own—"often has the ungodly been seen "in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-"tree—but when you went by has he not been gone?" Such men are guilty of an egregious mistake in their first setting out—they choose a wrong foundation—they overlook the rock and build upon the sand—and, "when the rain descends, and the floods

" come, and the winds blow, and beat upon the houſe " it falls, and often great is the fall of it." When they have practiſed iniquity ſo long, they get bewil-dered in its mazes—and, having been accuſtomed to toil in the artifices of deceit, and the ſtratagems of diſ-honeſty, " the pit they dig for others they fall into in " the end, themſelves."

I will preſume a little longer on your patience, whilſt I earneſtly exhort you to the uniform practice of honeſty and uprightneſs in all your dealings.

And let me, firſt, intreat you, as you regard your own peace of mind, and the good opinion of the world.—If you deal unjuſtly—whether you be rich or poor—you deprive yourſelves of the greateſt of earthly bleſsings, inward ſatisfaction. Many there are, who have been ſucceſsful in their callings, who have labored with patient perſeverance—many who have accumulated with aſtoniſhing rapidity, and when you expected they would enjoy the fruits of their induſ-

try, the power has been withheld from them.—No sooner is the hurry of business over—no sooner does the tumult of employ subside—than the mind, wanting an object on which to engage her thoughts, turns, naturally, to the hoarded treasure. The man reflects how it has been obtained—the very act of bequeathing his goods is a sad memento how unjustly he has acquired them. His animal spirits droop—the functions of the soul are almost suspended—"fearfulness & "trembling come upon him, & an horrible dread over"whelms him." Or, to drown reflection, he enters into various engagements—his uneasy thoughts are dispelled by the incense of adulation, the mirth of company, and the revelling of wine. And, if he can but keep reflection at a distance, he wears a look of complacency, & assumes a smile of cheerfulness—Miserable is the state of that man who is at variance with himself—whose Reproof and Torment are in his own Bosom! Would you not prefer a little—would you not prefer

a ſtate which will barely ſupply food and cloathing for the body, to the envied ſtate of being poſſeſſed of "riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt?" Would you not prefer a ſtate in which you can challenge all the world, and ſay, "I have injured no "man, I have oppreſſed no man, I have defrauded "no man?"—in which you can appeal to God for the innocency of your hands, and the integrity of your heart?

To exhort thoſe in a lower ſtation of life—"not "to have in their houſes divers meaſures, a great and "a ſmall—but, on the contrary, a perfect and juſt "weight, and a perfect and juſt meaſure"—in other words, whatever may be your calling—to act honeſtly and fairly, without fraud and without deceit—would to God ſuch Exhortation were unneceſſary! Would to God you would conſider your chief dependence is an unblemiſhed Character! And if you ſtain it by open fraud or ſecret impoſition, you rob yourſelves & become

poor indeed—you are bereft of the support of your benefactors and the consolations of your conscience.—As it has seemed good to the Almighty to place you in an humble Sphere of life, be not impatient of poverty—"but trust in the Lord and be doing good," discharge the duties of your station—"and verily you shall be "fed." By holding fast your integrity, and being content by patient labor to support yourselves, you engage all mankind to become your friends; and continued kindnesses will do you more good, than what you can make, by chance, through fraud or over-reaching.—When you lie on the bed of Sickness, and stand in need of the assistance of your friends and benefactors—your pain will be assuaged, and your bed made easy, by the attentions of the humane, & the relief of the wealthy. And above all, you will make God your friend.—When He calls you out of this world to give an account of your conduct, your Integrity "will "cover a multitude of sins"—it will plead for you with

irresistible efficacy, and, having gained the approbation of men on earth, will secure the favor of God in heaven. When, therefore, you are disposed to act dishonestly and deceitfully, call to mind that "all that "do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are "an abomination unto the Lord."

As to those who have risen to superior stations, let me request you to remember, that, however independent you may be on men, you are subject still to the will of Providence—"He is about your path, "and about your bed, and spieth out all your ways." At his dread tribunal you are to meet, face to face, "the poor, the needy, the fatherless, and him that "had none to help him."—Can distress challenge you as its Author, can poverty fix on you as its cause? You will not then be protected by the power of Gold, nor the superiority of Station. As the Righteous and the Just will obtain the approbation of their Judge—so will He render unto the Unrighteous and the Un-

just "seven-fold into their Bosom.—For all that do "unjustly and unrighteously are an abomination "unto the Lord."

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